

ABRAHAM LINCOLN—THE SEER

By

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FEBRUARY 12TH, 1924

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O those who at this day still collect the carpings and fault findings of the Lincoln presidential campaigns, and of the Lincoln administration,—to those who attempt to pull down that colossal figure to their own mental dimensions—to those who discern in Lincoln a master politician who was ever on the alert for the chance to hold public office—to those who are convinced that Lincoln muddled through the Civil War, and succeeded only by reason of the remarkable generation of men who sprang up at the call of country—to those who believe that Seward was the master mind who guided our foreign policies, that Chase was the financial genius, Stanton the mind that guided our armies, and McClellan the drill master of the Rebellion—what I have to say will be of little interest. But to those who have swept away the libels and the grotesque attributes which have been attempted to be maliciously ascribed to the great War President, my message may add a little more light to that strange figure—whose providential appearance at that time and in that place has but one parallel in recorded history. To those who see in Lincoln more than the uncouth frontiersman, more than the circuit lawyer, the local politician, the fact that his earthly existence falls into almost the identical mould which held the life and the work of Moses, the old lawgiver, will become more and more apparent. On examining the sermons and pamphlets immediately after the assassination of the martyred President and the innumerable orations and speeches on succeeding anniversaries of that never-to-be-forgotten event, I find that very few people have noted the comparison between the ancient lawgiver and our liberator, other than the final act on Mount Nebo, which was so beautifully set forth in the classic sermon preached by Henry Ward Beecher. All seem to overlook the very bringing up of the two youths; the fact that both Moses and Lincoln were endowed with extraordinary physical power, as is seen from the conflict between Moses and the Egyptian slave driver on the one hand, and Lincoln, who on all occasions participated in and superintended all physical conflicts, and became known as the most physically powerful young man in Sangamon County. They have equally overlooked the appearance of the two men,—Moses, as the Midrash tells us, was not endowed with any physical attractiveness; his appearance, his manner, his stature, his being "heavy of speech," are all well known:

and, if we similarly examine Lincoln's ungainly features and ungainly body, we find similar characteristics. But who ever thinks of the appearance of Moses when we see what has been transmitted to us by painter, sculptor and poet, any more than we think of Lincoln's appearance when we see that miracle in bronze wrought by the genius of Augustus St. Gaudens.

The men of Lincoln's time who required the bullet of the assassin to open their beclouded eyes, saw in his untimely taking off—the resemblance only to that other taking off—of Moses on Pisgah. But in spite of the burning desire of the lawgiver to cross the Jordan and lead his people into the Promised Land—his work was done—his task was completed—a life work and a giant task which sapped his strength, which tired the noble frame in spite of the fact that "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." Moses was at his best on Sinai and at the Red Sea. At no time thereafter is he seen in more heroic proportions. Moses the seer, Moses of the great joint debate with the mighty Pharaoh—the debate in ten sessions—Moses at Sinai—the terrible Moses who—when he saw his people dance about the golden calf—broke the tablets—and the Moses who spoke "eye to eye" with the Lord of Hosts, for an entire people—in their presence, in their hearing, was by all odds a greater Moses than the Moses at the completion of his task. Moses the General leading his people following the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day to the Red Sea, was infinitely more resourceful, more heroic, more capable than the Moses of forty years later—after the travail, the wandering, the rebellions, the tasks of forty years—during which he wrought the miracle of transforming a nation of slaves into a nation of priests—a nation of priests who have ministered to mankind from that day to this. And so in His infinite wisdom, His Maker called him, the most modest of all men, his most trusted servant, the only man with whom he spoke face to face—to his eternal reward. And strange as it may seem, this marvelous parallel between Moses and Lincoln has been overlooked by preacher, by biographer, by contemporary and present day Lincoln speaker and orator. From the very first moment when Abraham Lincoln appears, he hears the voice of God, like the youth in the temple—Eli heard it not—like that young prophet, Lincoln in the slave market at New Orleans hears the call to destroy slavery.

Is there any doubt that Lincoln heard the divine summons then and there? Moses heard it and saw it in the form of the slave task master—whom he slew and whose body he hid in the sand. Moses heard the call from the burning bush—Lincoln in the slave market in New Orleans. Henceforth, his whole life was devoted to the task of abolishing slavery—as was that of the other man of God—to destroy the power and the results of the Egyptian task master. Then,

in the solemn solitudes of the prairies, in the great primeval forest, in the virgin fields, he received his mission and his preparation, as did his great prototype receive his in the desert of Midian. Both given to contemplation—to introspection, each was prepared and educated during years of study, of exacting tasks, of enlightening experiences for the life task before him, one was steeped in the marvelous culture of Egypt, the other read every book that he could find within fifty miles. Lincoln too was at the height of his physical and intellectual vigor, not on that fatal Good Friday—when he passed from belonging to the American people to that of the ages—not after the storm and stress of six years of the hardest, most wearing and exhausting political and military campaign this country or the world had up to his day ever seen—not then was he at his best. His pathetic longing to return to Springfield for rest, for a quiet life, this certainly did not betoken the militant debater, the victorious candidate and indomitable war president of 1861-1865. He, like Moses at the Red Sea, was at his best in the midst of divided councils, in the midst of the babel of voices, forcing advice upon him of how to save the Union, how to win the war, how to terminate the bloodshed—there he stood alone in the midst of that mob—ready to destroy him, ready to remove him, ready to tear from his hands the task for which he was divinely anointed. Here is the heroic figure duplicating that other figure at the Red Sea. He was at his best when he came into the Northern camp—and amid the noise and confusion paused to utter a single sentence that he might be heard above the din. He bore a commission from God on high! He said: “A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half free and half slave. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved: I do not expect the house to fall: but I do expect it will cease to be divided.” He was at his best when he replied to Greeley: “My paramount object is to save the Union and not either to save or destroy Slavery.” He was at his best when he penned the Emancipation, the Gettysburg address, and the First and Second Inaugural. He was at his best when he brought to a victorious conclusion the war and saved the Union, crushed rebellion and freed the slave. As Lincoln said there were four parties in the North; Moses had his four parties. Those who were ready to return to Egypt—those who were ready to throw themselves into the Red Sea—those ready to compromise with Egypt—and those who stood ready to fight for the Lord, for his principles and for his newly freed people.

Lincoln had his four parties: Those who were ready to sacrifice the Union so long as they could accomplish the abolition of slavery. Among them were also business men who were ready to sacrifice the Union in order to save their business,—in order, as they said, that

"the grass might not grow in the streets of our commercial centers." Still others there were who were pacifists, who wanted to avoid bloodshed regardless of results, and were ready to go back to the pre-War status and have each State determine for itself the question of slavery.

Then there was the traitor, the Southern propagandist in the North, cooperating with his fellows in the South, the emissaries of the South and of secession were everywhere. But thank God, the greatest and most important of these four parties were those who said, "Let us go out and fight them"—who cheerfully sang and responded: "We are coming, Father Abraham"—that party responded with funds, with help, with loyalty, and overwhelmed and finally convinced the Greeleys, the McClellans and even Beecher, Wendel Phillips and Carl Schurz that he—Lincoln—was the master of the situation and his method was the only method which would keep the border States in the Union—which meant the ultimate extinction of slavery and of the Rebellion.

As we proceed the parallel grows until the two figures of the ages almost look alike. It was to the most modest man in the land in each case—millennia apart—that the Almighty committed the great tasks. Some of his erstwhile enemies began to perceive that light in the features of the Great Emancipator, as they dwelt with him through those times which tried men's souls.

The traces of communion with his Maker are almost as numerous in the life of Lincoln as in the life of Moses—from the moment when he heard the Methodist preacher on the questions of the hour—and came away convinced that he was to bear a great part in the irrepressible conflict until the day before his taking off when he dreamt that the President was in the catafalque in the East Room—his life is full of visions—of dreams, of direct appears to the God of Moses. From the day he left Springfield, with forebodings that he would never return, to the day after Gettysburg, when General Sickles tells us that after he was wounded at Gettysburg, Lincoln visited him in the hospital, he asked Lincoln what he thought of the victory at Gettysburg, and what he had been doing or preparing to do during that awful battle, and Lincoln replied, "Well, Sickles, if you want to know what I was doing about that time, I will tell you. There is one room in the White House where there is little furniture, and I went in there and shut the door, and got down on my knees and said to the Lord: 'You know, Lord, I have done all I can. This is your struggle, Lord; I've done all I can!' And then I cried out with all my heart: 'Oh, God, give us the victory.' When suddenly it occurred to me to say: 'Oh, that I might have some token by which I could be assured of a victory!' Then such a sweet spirit came over me, such an undescribable spirit, that I was assured of a victory before I

ever heard the news!" To the very last day when he told Grant, in the presence of the whole Cabinet, that he was sure that Sherman had been victorious because "I had my usual dream—such as I had before Antietam, Gettysburg and Vicksburg." In one form or another he communed with God.

And to whom did he tell these—and in whose presence did he repeat all these—to his wife, to his intimates, to those who were anxious to agree with him? No! To his enemies—to his detractors, to men of steel and iron, like Grant—to Chase, to Stanton, to his Cabinet, to his neighbors in Springfield, to the entire Nation in his Second Inaugural.

From the highest reach that Lincoln had attained before his accession to the Presidency, to the zenith of his career, the space seems incalculable. The study of his earlier life shows, indeed, that he possessed clearness of thought, remarkable gift of expression, native sagacity, honesty of purpose, and courage of conviction; that he loved his country; but that he possessed elements of greatness in such degree as the War revealed could hardly have been surmised. And that he should manifest so soon and so signally his ability to rule a great nation in the most dangerous period of its existence; that he should overtake his associates and prove that, more than they, he was fitted to save the Government; that he could wield a power that was greater than that of any of his predecessors and surpassing that exercised by any contemporary ruler, king or emperor, could not have been foreseen by any lacking divine inspiration. Not by graded steps, but by giant stride, Lincoln reached the height of power, achievement and fame.

True, the progress of the War revealed growth in character, in thought and in force, and he stood much higher at its close than at its beginning; but at its opening it early became apparent that Providence had so shaped the country's destiny that the man who had been chosen mainly because of his availability as a candidate was far and away the one man for the office and for the work.

There is nothing more for the great leader to do. His work is ended. He had trudged across the prairie; climbed the foothills; has struggled up the mountain side; he is almost at the end of the journey and is very tired. His tragic visage was that of one who had borne the grief of a people and carried their sorrow. He has removed from our free institutions the curse of slavery and established at last an indestructible Union; in a few days he will reach the top of the mountain of fame; tarry there for a brief moment and be silhouetted forever against the skyline of history. Then of him it shall be said, as of one of old—"He was not, for God took him"—and to us is left the heritage of the wonderful afterglow of Abraham Lincoln's life.

